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C O N F I D E N T I A L LILONGWE 000473

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: CABINET DELAY SIGNALS PRESIDENT'S PARTY WOES

REF: LILONGWE 457

Classified By: Pol/Econ Officer Peter W. Lord, reasons 1.5 (b/d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Ten days after the elections, President Bingu wa Mutharika has not yet appointed a cabinet. With speculation and rumors abounding, it is clear that Mutharika is having a difficult time both in balancing internal UDF politics and in building a working majority in Parliament. The cabinet's final size and composition will be a clear indicator of Mutharika's independence (or not) from former President and current UDF chairman Bakili Muluzi, who remains very engaged in party and government affairs. END SUMMARY.

BINGU: "NO MORE THAN TWENTY," MULUZI: A LIST OF 32

2. (C) As reported reftel, President Bingu wa Mutharika told donor chiefs of mission on May 27 that his cabinet would be "no more than twenty," including the President and two Vice Presidents. Reduced from 46, a small cabinet was a central point in Mutharika's message to donors that the GOM was ready to get serious about stabilizing the economy, kickstarting growth, and reducing poverty.

3. (C) However, UDF insiders say that Muluzi gave Mutharika a list of 32 people who should be in cabinet. The list was reportedly handed to Mutharika at a party meeting in Blantyre on May 30 that Muluzi "summoned" the new President to.

WILLING TO WORK WITH ANYONE

4. (C) Faced with its dismal showing in parliamentary elections and looking to build a working majority in Parliament, the UDF has been courting independent MPs and opposition leaders. It first was rebuffed by Malawi Congress Party (MCP) President John Tembo, who controls 59 seats in Parliament. UDF insiders report that UDF chairman Muluzi, flanked by Mutharika, then offered Gwanda Chakuamba's seven-party Mgwirizano Coalition, which commands 25 seats in Parliament, several ministerial positions to form an alliance with the UDF. Muluzi supposedly offered positions to Coalition President Chakuamba (to be Second Vice President), People's Transformation Party (PETRA) President Kamuzu Chibambo, People's Progressive Movement (PPM) President Aleke Banda, and Republican Party (RP) Vice President Bazuka Mhango. (Chakuamba, apparently more interested than other members of the Coalition, reportedly was offered a large sum of money, a house in Lilongwe, and the Second Vice Presidency.)

5. (SBU) After confirming that a meeting took place at Muluzi's Blantyre residence on June 1, Aleke Banda said on a news radio program that the Coalition met to discuss the offer and decided to reject it.

COMMENT

6. (C) That the UDF would consider entering into an alliance with its political arch-enemies (who incidentally have filed a petition in the courts to declare the presidential elections null and void) is a sign of the party's desperation and its cynicism. Faced with the prospect of being in the minority in Parliament, the UDF will do whatever it takes to form a coalition to keep it in control.

7. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED. If the UDF is successful (which is by no means certain) in wooing the opposition and independents into an alliance, Mutharika will have a hard time keeping his pledge to slash the size of his cabinet since ministerial seats will surely be the reward for support. Already under pressure from Muluzi loyalists in his own party, Mutharika also needs to keep the UDF faithful happy. And the longer he waits to appoint a cabinet, the greater the erosion of confidence in him. END COMMENT.
DOUGHERTY